

TOWARDS EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION OF HUMAN RESOURCES AS A STRATEGY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL IN JIGAWA STATE

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ABSTRACT

We cannot talk of development in a country like Nigeria with over seventy percent (70%) of the population living in rural areas in abject poverty without basic social amenities and infrastructure. The third tier of government is expected to design strategies for effective utilization of human resources for rural development at its level, being the close to the rural areas. Such strategies are critically examined as one of the major objectives in this article. The approach is mainly a critical analysis of available data. The article is concluded with some major recommendations in respect of power to utilize its revenue without interference by state governments (Autonomy of local governments). It is also recommended that United Nations, Food and Agricultural Organization and WHO should assist and also deal with local governments directly in the process of rural development.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of rural development in Nigeria like any other agrarian society cannot be over-emphasized, considering the fact that over seventy percent (70%) of our population development and utilization. It has been a deliberate attempt not to limit our study to a particular local government area, so that we can be able to have some ideas on what happens in other parts of the country, of course, appreciating that fact that it is not possible to cover the whole country.

The functions of local government in Nigeria, what a local government is supposed to be doing in Nigeria is in conformity with the objectives of the local government reforms of 1976 which include:

- a) To make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives by developing or delegating them to local representative bodies.
- b) To facilitate the exercise of democratic self-government close to the local levels of our society and to encourage initiative and leadership.
- c) To mobilize human and material resources through the involvement of members of the public in their local development.

- d) To provide a two way channel of communication between local communities and government (both state and federal).

In a nutshell the objectives of the local government reform of 1976 is to bring government closer to the people. It is important to make a specific reference to objectives (c) above which the closest bearing on this paper especially when it refers to mobilization of human and live in rural areas, quite a lot has often been said about rural development by successive governments at all levels without commensurate commitments of the zeal and resources for the attainment of the ultimate goals. Since local governments are saddled with a big chunk of the responsibility for rural development, effective utilization of human as a strategy for rural development at this level has become necessary if not imperative.

This paper is set to examine how local governments can effectively manage their resources as a strategy for rural development in Jigawa State. It must be admitted that the topic is broad and is likely to constitute obstacles to a more cohesive analysis. It is broad in the sense that it contains about four key concepts or sub-themes that can be further developed into different areas of study. In the first place, it has some bearings on the functions of local government in Nigeria. Secondly, it delves into the bearings on the broad areas of human resources management which embraces human resources development and utilization. Lastly, but not exhaustively, it stretches to rural development, which is yet another broad area of popular research interests. These key areas are so crucial that we cannot omit any of them and will expect to be exonerated from academic injustice or even defect.

The paper inevitably commences with a brief overview of the local government functions in Nigeria. This is followed very closely with another brief consideration of the issues of rural development before delving into the areas of human resources development and utilization. It has been a deliberate attempt not to limit our study to material resources through the involvement of members of the public in their local development. In fact, it is needless to re-emphasize the importance of human and material resources because without them, no any other objective can be achieved. This paper is actually set to examine how the human resources can be effectively mobilized or managed by local governments for rural development in Nigeria.

Although the task of manpower planning, development and utilization is essentially a central government responsibility, the involvement of local governments in the processes is a matter of necessity. This is particularly true of less developed countries including Nigeria with over 70% of the population living in rural areas. It follows that the government is almost beyond the reach of a vast majority of the populace, because the higher the level of urbanization, the closer the government to the people. This is particularly true of the central government which is usually found to be concentrating its activities on one or two cities at the expense of a vast area under its jurisdiction.

The trend of concentration of government activities on one or two cities tend to hasten the pace of urbanization of capital cities and consolidate the position of rural poverty and rural underdevelopment in the other parts of the state or the federation. The rural majority who are not only poor and underdeveloped but also exposed to all the mankind enemies which include dreadful diseases, epidemics, starvation and under-nourishment are then left at the mercy of local governments majority of which are rural based in this country. And of course while the municipal local governments like those of Kano, Jigawa, Borno, Kaduna, Ilorin, Yola to mention just few team up with the state governments to invest huge sums of money for rapid urbanization of these cities.

The Role of Local Governments in Educational Development

Education is one of the items in the concurrent legislative list involving all the levels of government in the country. Of course, it has to be so due to some inherent structural and fundamental problems. We cannot expect a high level of performance by making it an exclusive list item for example, without encountering administrative or management deficiencies, particularly at the grassroots level where the federal government officials will have to face so many limitations in terms of skills, data, time and even the necessary funds for effective penetration and management in the vast majority of rural areas. What this means in essence is that it is cheaper and more effective and convenient to handle certain educational matters particularly at the lower levels like the primary education on or at the grassroots level by the local communities themselves or their local governments as their representatives.

The local government inability to meet the aspirations of the yearning population usually creates a bad public image for itself and subjects it to public criticism, outcry and in some cases resorting to threats, intimidation, and strikes.

Food and Agriculture

There is hardly any nation or community in this world that needs to be reminded of the importance of food and agriculture as a necessity for livelihood. And any nation or community which does not embark on massive production of food and agriculture is billed for doom, poverty, starvation and high death rate. The necessity of food and agriculture for the sustenance of human resources has been given much publicity and recognition at all levels of the society from international organization (FAO) which has become a specialized agency within the meaning of Article 57 of the UN charter. For example, reports all nations accepting its (FAO's) Constitution "to promote the common welfare by furthering separate and collective action on their part for the purposes of raising levels of nutrition and standards of living of the people under their respective jurisdictions. Securing improvements in the efficiency of the production and distribution of food and agricultural products. Bettering the condition of rural populations; and thus contributing

towards an expanding world economy (Article 2 (1); and ensuring humanity's freedom from hunger."

The above quotation stresses the importance of food and agriculture as a necessary means of sustaining and utilizing the human resources in all societies. It also stresses the important roles expected at all levels of government in order to achieve these objectives. But the question is to what extent or how effective are these roles performed at all governmental levels?

To answer this question in respect of FAO, one will not hesitate to submit that a majority of us, particularly in the rural areas do not even know all of its existence let alone its objectives and achievements, since its activities are still scanty if any and are yet to penetrate the rural based local governments and the peasants in this country. At national level, Nigeria has been coming out with policies on food and agriculture right from independence to date. Yet, the concept of reliance on food and agriculture is far from reality. The country still spends huge sums of money on importation of food and agricultural items. The country's fertilizer plants, for example, are yet to meet the needs of our farmers and save part of our foreign exchange in the world market. The country spends huge sums of money annually on importation of fertilizers. But we are all aware of the difficulty in seeing and purchasing these fertilizers by our farmers. And this is where the local governments are expected to play the most crucial roles. Being the closest to the people, the local governments must ensure that fertilizers come to them as a matter of constitutional right and the distribution a constitutional obligation.

We are also aware that so many villages and farmlands are inaccessible. This is one of the factors responsible for so many hardships and obstacles to massive production of food and other agricultural items. The ultimate effect is underutilization of the human resources in the rural areas, a rural-urban migration and eminent national resources.

Strategies for Human Resources Development and Utilization

Our discussion so far has centered on the inhibitive factors for effective human resources development and utilization. At this juncture, the paper is set to design models or strategies meant to overcome these obstacles in order to enhance the chances of effective development and utilization of human resources by local governments. We cannot talk of effective human resource utilization without first and foremost considering human resource development. In other words, effective human resource development is a prerequisite for effective human resource utilization in any given society. The local government is the closest tier of government to the people at a grassroots level. In fact, to the common man in the rural area, the local government is its own world of polity or the entire political system in the country, because, what happens at both state and federal levels are far beyond the reach, beyond its comprehension and imagination. The local government must therefore device various strategies for effective development of the potential of the individuals in its area of jurisdiction.

We have already highlighted the teething problems of primary schools administration which is a heavy responsibility for the local government. Some of these problems can be resolved by resorting to utilization of local resources both human and material resources. The problems of inadequate or shortage of classrooms, for example, can be curbed by embarking on a number of community development projects. Instead of waiting for Statutory Allocation or Central Government Grants, the local government should always encourage the various communities in its area of jurisdiction to embark on classrooms construction through community initiatives and participation. By so doing the local government involves the community Development Division of the Ministry of Social Development, the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Development.

The adult education programmes are not given adequate attention by the various governments in our country. That is rather unfortunate and the trend must be curbed if we are to reduce the high illiteracy rate in the country. If we agree that the illiteracy rate is higher in the rural areas than the urban areas, we cannot run away from the fact that the local government has a very serious responsibility and a crucial role to play in our efforts to reduce the illiteracy rate in this country. Again, both local human and material resources should be exploited for this purpose. Although the various government agencies responsible for adult education such as the Adult Education Departments of the Ministry of Education and Local Governments respectively, have a vital role to play in this respect, we don't have to relax our efforts for complete dependencies. There is no doubt that villages or communities could embark and execute adult education programmes without necessarily receiving assistance from any government. Local volunteers can constitute a corps of instructors. All the local government needs to do is to enlighten the various communities in its jurisdiction along this line of thoughts and action. Similar efforts should be extended to the health sector.

As regards the issue of Food and Agriculture, it must be appreciated that nearly everybody in the rural areas is involved in production of food and other agricultural items. Unfortunately however, experiences have shown that many farmers encounter hardships in their efforts for food production. The banking facilities are far beyond their reach, just like the fertilizer bonanza is becoming a thing of the past. These, in addition to inadequate / complete absence of storage facilities, tend to place the farmers, particularly the rural based ones in miserable conditions. If we are to curb these problems, banking facilities should be made very liberal and easily accessible by our farmers including the rural based ones. The local governments should take the lead in a nationwide campaign for a high level decentralization of the Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB)—a sort of taking the farmer bank from the towns to the farmers, that is by encouraging rural banking facilities. A similar zeal should be pursued in respect of fertilizers and storage facilities. One will not hesitate therefore to support the idea that the federal government should leave the procurement and distribution of fertilizers to the State and local governments. This is particularly so when we consider the fact that the federal government is too far beyond the reach of our farmers who are mostly rural dwellers. Secondly, there is a tendency

for laxity on the part of federal government officials in the processes of procurement and distribution of fertilizers, especially when one considers the fact that the need for fertilizers differs from one State to another.

There are some areas in the country which need little or no fertilizers whereas others need it particularly Kano, Jigawa, Bauchi, Yobe, Adamawa, Niger, Plateau states etc. It is strongly recommended that lack of accessibility of fertilizers to farmers renders a high percentage of our human resources redundant or under-utilized and the ultimate result is poverty, malnutrition and starvation. A final suggestion on the issue of food and agriculture is in respect of FAO which should make concerted efforts to be seen and felt by the rural communities throughout the Federation of Nigeria and other less developed countries with similar problems. In this respect, exchange visits between FAO officials and local government chairmen should be encouraged and be seen as a matter of routine for better understanding of our problems as guiding principle for policy formulation and implementation.

On rural communities in Nigeria and other less developed countries some of the major recommendations include an urgent need for rural banking for the benefits of our rural farmers or communities. They also include a strong call for extension and intensification of activities of the United Nations Specialized Agencies. The UN Food and Agricultural Organization, for example, should extend its activities to cover the various rural areas so as to boost the efforts because hunger is a major inhibitive factor for development. Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO) should penetrate the rural areas through their representative local governments and provide health services including technical advice to the rural communities, because, only a healthy population can contribute effectively toward development processes.

One other major recommendation made in this paper is the need for local governments themselves to encourage the people they represented to embark on community development projects as a strategy to committing the central government for assistance or grants. Finally in view of the poor financial positions of the local governments, the state government contributions should be increased to 50%, leaving the remaining 50% to be shared between the local government and communities in the ratio of 3:2. It is only when these strategies are designed and followed that we can talk of effective local government development and utilization of human resources for rural development in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Right from the onset, the inherent problems of the paper have been highlighted. It has not been an easy task, for example, to cater adequately for both scope and depth due to the inherent characteristics of the nature of the paper itself which commences with an overview of the functions of local governments before moving on to examine some aspects of subsystems of rural development with particular references to education, health, food and agriculture. Our discussion

on these subsystems has thrown more light on the various problems confronting local government in this country. In fact, the discussion has unveiled some of the major inhibiting factors for rural development in Nigeria in particular and other less developed countries in general. The discussion has enabled us to make a good number of suggestion which if heeded to will go a long way to solve some of the major problems confronting rural based local governments.

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